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Educación a distancia

How can learning vocabulary strategies be taught in class?

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INTRODUCTION

In spite of its great importance and relevance for language teaching, vocabulary is usually neglected in state schools. Many teachers mostly concentrate on the four macro skills and on grammar, treating vocabulary as part of them. Vocabulary should be taught separately, or at least given special attention, since it is essential for conveying meaning. Just knowing the rules of language or being competent in the four skills is not enough to express thoughts, opinions, ideas or emotions. This does not mean that words should be taught in isolation. Just knowing the Spanish equivalent of a word is not enough. Connotative and denotative meanings are both important, as well as collocations, synonyms and antonyms.

It is well known that language learning strategies are very useful, since they lead to learners' autonomy and long term learning. Helping students identify which strategies they find appropriate and providing them with examples of strategies they could implement taking into account their learning styles should be part of our teaching practice.

I decided to write about this topic because I believe that vocabulary is essential to understand and produce language. Even if grammar mistakes are made, we can understand each other, but if we make vocabulary mistakes, there is misunderstanding or no understanding at all.

In their course book "Innovations", Hugh Dellar and Darryl Hocking leave the following piece of advice for students that I think expresses that idea of what I am writing about: *"If you spend most of your time studying grammar, your English will not improve very much. You will see most improvement if you learn more words and expressions. You can say very little with grammar, but you can say almost anything with words!"* I believe that this message clearly resembles the idea behind vocabulary teaching.

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When I was a student myself I learned a lot of grammatical structures and I thought I knew everything about the English language. As I grew up I understood that I just had learned how to form sentences and some general vocabulary and that I lacked a lot of specific words. This must have happened because when I was a child the communicative approach was not so in vogue. My teacher followed a most grammatical one, concentrating only on translation, grammar rules and structures. When I started my teacher training at university and had to learn so many new words specific of each subject I was almost obliged to use learning strategies. It was then that I understood their importance, not only for learning vocabulary but for all kinds of learning.

It is within this context that I will attempt to provide an insight into the way in which my students learn vocabulary. In this research study I will first observe if they use any vocabulary learning strategies. Second, I will help them identify which strategies are the most useful for them. I will do this by devising and implementing activities that cater for different learning styles and help the students become aware of the usefulness of learning strategies.

I started reading about this topic and among many books I found Rebecca Oxford's book *Language learning strategies: what every teacher should know*. I personally believe that it is very complete and clear as regards language learning strategies. It has proved very useful to me and this is why I decided to focus on this material for the present research work. As teachers we must work in order to help our students find the best way to learn, taking into account their learning styles and preferences.

I will carry out action research, which is defined by Johnson and Christensen (2008: 10) as the type of research that "focuses on problems that practitioners face in

their everyday practice.” The problem I observed is that the students at the state primary school where I work do not seem to have learned vocabulary appropriately.

Thus, I decided to focus on the teaching of vocabulary through the use of learning strategies. I believe that if the students implement learning strategies in the learning of lexis, they will improve their acquisition.

When I had to decide whether to do quantitative or qualitative research, I implemented what Johnson and Christensen (2008:51) refer to as “mixed research, when researchers use a mixture or combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, approaches or concepts in a single research study.” The quantitative aspect of the present research is given by the use of a checklist in which the students had to rate some statements related to the use of learning strategies while the qualitative aspect has to do with the observation of the students’ performance as they solved some activities designed to implement some strategies they seemed to ignore.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1 A lexical or a grammatical approach?

Over the years, different language teaching approaches have been implemented. The grammar-translation approach and the communicative approach stand at opposite ends of a continuum. The former aims at grammar mastery while the latter’s focus is on communication.

Even though for a long time the grammar-vocabulary dichotomy was the basis of language teaching, it was considered invalid when Michael Lewis introduced the Lexical Approach (1997:7), according to which “language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary but often of multi-word prefabricated chunks which when combined, produce continuous coherent text”. He claims that “teachers using the Lexical Approach

will, instead of analysing language whenever possible, be more inclined to direct learners' attention to chunks which are as large as possible."

The Lexical Approach (1997:34) concentrates on "actually-occurring or probable language and not-as has been the tendency- on all the possible sentences of English most of which have not occurred, and, we suspect, never will occur."

Lewis (1997:17-19) claims that the most fundamental principle of linguistics is the arbitrariness of the sign. "All lexical items are arbitrary: they are the consensus of what has been institutionalised, the agreed language which a particular group do use, selected from what they could use, actual language as opposed to theoretical possible language." The Lexical approach claims that many multi-word items are word-like in quality, and share the arbitrariness of words. He adds: "arbitrariness extends to all kinds of lexical items-Collocations and Expressions as well as individual words."

1.2 What is lexis?

Lexis has been defined as "a broader term meaning more than just vocabulary. Vocabulary is used to talk of the individual words of the language, while lexis covers single words and multi-word objects which have the same status in the language as simple words, i.e. the items we store in our mental lexicons ready for use (Lewis: 2000: 217)".

According to Lewis there are four types of chunks:

- Words: are the most familiar category, they are considered lexical items and they can stand alone or be part of a sentence where a single substitution produces a completely new meaning. Even though they are the largest and most familiar category, they do not pose much pedagogical challenge;
- Collocations: when certain words co-occur with greater than random frequency. They range from fully fixed, through relatively fixed to totally novel. Much of our mental lexicon is stored in complete, fully contextualized phrases.

- Fixed expressions: such as social greetings, politeness phrases, “phrase book” language, and idioms.
- Semi-fixed expressions: allow some variation. Examples include almost fixed expressions which permit a minimal variation (*It's/That's not my fault*), spoken sentences with a simple slot (*Can you pass me the...., please.?*), expressions with a slot which must be filled with a particular kind of slot filler (*hello. Nice to see you. I haven't seen you + time expression with +for or since*), sentence heads, which can be completed in many ways (*What was really interesting/surprising/annoying was....*) and more extended frames such as those used in formal letters or at the beginning of an academic paper.

The last category shows that these expressions range from very short to very long and from almost free to very fixed. If language is viewed from a lexical point of view, the distinction between “fixed” vocabulary and “generative” grammar is seen as an invalid oversimplification, since language consists of items which occupy all points of the continuum between these two extremes.

1.3 What is meant by “knowing a word?”

Nation (2008:64) states that the information that needs to be learned about words is usually found in good dictionaries:

“Good dictionaries provide a wealth of information about words, and good dictionary use involves using them to find the common underlying meaning of the word, to relate it to already known words, to help fix its form in memory, and to gain some wider knowledge of its use.”

He provides a table with all the information that can be obtained from a dictionary: form, meaning and use. I focused on the receptive aspect of the table, since at this stage input was more important and useful for the students.

Table 1 WHAT IS INVOLVED IN KNOWING A WORD

Form	Spoken	R P	What does the word sound like? How is the word pronounced?
	Written	R P	What does the word look like? How is the word written and spelled?
	Word parts	R P	What parts are recognizable in this word? What word parts are needed to express the meaning?
Meaning	Form and meaning	R P	What meaning does this word form signal? What word form can be used to express this meaning?
	Concepts and referents	R P	What is included in the concept? What items can the concept refer to?
	Associations	R P	What other words does this make us think of? What words or types of words must we use with this one?
Use	Grammatical functions	R P	In what patterns does the word occur? In what patterns must we use this word?
	Collocations	R P	What words or types of words occur with this one? What words or types of words must we use with this one?
	Constraints on use (register, frequency...)	R P	When, where, and how often would we expect to meet this word? When, where, and how often can we use this word?

In column 3, R=receptive knowledge, P= productive knowledge. Nation (2008: 61)

Monolingual dictionaries contain all this information, bilingual dictionaries, however, are usually less complete, and bring mainly information about form and meaning, sometimes accompanied by example sentences or phrases.

Nation (2008:99) also refers to the notion of learning burden of a word, which means “working out what needs to be taught about a word. It differs from word to word according to the ways in which the word relates to first language knowledge and already existing knowledge of the second language or other known languages. The purpose of working out the learning burden of a word is to find what aspects will be difficult when learning a particular word and thus where the teacher can give useful help.”

This can be done as need arises, that is to say, as new words appear different parts of it will be dealt with. Not all the learning burden of a word will be dealt with simultaneously.

Table 2 DISCOVERING THE LEARNING BURDEN

Meaning	Form and meaning Concepts and referents Associations	Is the word a loan word in the L1? Is there an L1 word with roughly the same meaning? Does the word fit into the same sets as an L1 word of similar meaning?
Form	Spoken form Written form Word parts	Can the learners repeat the word accurately if they hear it? Can the learners write the word correctly if they hear it? Can the learners identify known affixes in the word?
Use	Grammatical functions	Does the word fit into predictable grammar patterns? Does the word have the same collocations as

	Collocation	an L1 word of similar meaning?
	Constraints on use	Does the word have the same restrictions on its use as an L1 word of similar meaning?

Nation, (2008:100)

1.4 The importance of recycling

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According to Scott Thornbury (2005:26) it has been estimated that “up to 80 per cent of material is lost within 24 hours of initial learning and in the absence of opportunities to use the language rapid forgetting occurs”. He adds that “research suggests that if learners see or use a word in a way different from the way they first met it, then better learning is achieved (2005:27).” In order to consolidate children’s understanding of vocabulary, they have to be offered opportunities to encounter words both in their written and spoken form. .”

Adding to this idea, Lewis (1997:47) claims that “the belief that language input should be provided one-brick-at-a-time emphasising the mastery of one bit before proceeding to the next one is misguided. The learner’s lexicon contains items which are fully available for recognition and production, items which are understood in context but not fully acquired and others which are usually known but misunderstood in some way. The lexicon may not develop linearly, but holistically. In order to help the learners to turn input into intake, class time should be spent helping them develop learning strategies.”

1.5 What are learning strategies?

In the middle 70s some authors started researching on language learning strategies. For example, Rubin (1975) defined them as “techniques or devices that learners use to acquire a second language knowledge.” That same year Stern referred to them as “general order approaches to learning which govern the choice of specific techniques.” In 1978 Bialystok defined them as “methods or conscious enterprises for exploiting available information to improve competence in second language.” Almost a

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decade later Rubin (1987) expands the definition saying that language learning strategies are “operations, steps, plans and routines of what learners do to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval and use of information to regulate learning.” By the same time Anita Wenden and Anna Chamot provided a more complete definition.

The former mentioned “language learning behaviours learners actually engage in, strategic knowledge about learning, to learn and regulate a second language learning”, while the latter defined them as “techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information.”

Even though all these researchers have contributed to a definition of learning strategies, the present research work will focus on Rebecca Oxford's. She defines them as “steps taken by students to enhance their own learning. They are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence (1990:1).” “They are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations (1990: 8).”

1.6 What are the main features of language learning strategies?

Rebecca Oxford (1990: 9) summarizes the main characteristics of learning strategies in the following table:

Table 3 Language learning strategies:

1. Contribute to the main goal, communicative competence
 2. Allow learners to become more self-directed
 3. Expand the role of teachers
 4. Are problem-oriented
 5. Are specific actions taken by the learner
 6. Involve many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive
 7. Support learning both directly and indirectly
 8. Are not always observable
 9. Are often conscious
 10. Can be taught
 11. Are flexible
 12. Are influenced by a variety of factors
-

1.7 Why are learning strategies important?

Since the development of communicative competence requires realistic interaction among learners using meaningful, contextualized language, learning

strategies become paramount: they help learners participate actively in such authentic communication and they operate in both general and specific ways to encourage the development of communicative competence.

Research has shown that those learners who use learning strategies learn more and better. According to Oxford (1990:8-9)

“(...) language learning strategies stimulate the growth of communicative competence in general. For example, metacognitive strategies help learners to regulate their own cognition and to focus, plan and evaluate their progress as they move toward communicative competence. Affective strategies develop the self- confidence and perseverance needed for learners to involve themselves actively in language learning, a requirement for attaining communicative competence. Social strategies provide increased interaction and more empathetic understanding, two qualities necessary to reach communicative competence. Certain cognitive strategies, such as analyzing, and particular memory strategies, like the keyword technique, are highly useful for understanding and recalling new information- important functions in the process of becoming competent in using the new language. Compensation strategies aid learners in overcoming knowledge gaps and continuing to communicate authentically; thus, these strategies help communicative competence to blossom.”

Oxford's strategies are language learning strategies in general, but they can be adapted to work with vocabulary learning in particular, being lexis one of the components of language.

1.8 A change in the role of teachers

Traditionally, teachers were seen as the “authority” in the classroom, identified with roles like instructor, leader, evaluator or controller. Unfortunately these roles do not

foster much communication among students, since these teachers somehow lead communication and make it go around them. Some teachers feel identified with the above mentioned roles. Some others feel eager to take a new role, that of facilitator, helper, coordinator and guide.

These new roles let teachers identify students' learning strategies and help them become more independent. They leave aside their hierarchical authority and concentrate on the quality and importance of the relationship with their learners.

As Oxford (1990:11) claims: "when students take more responsibility, more learning occurs, and both teachers and learners feel more successful."

1.9 How are learning strategies classified?

After reading about this topic, it can be stated that researchers have classified learning strategies using different taxonomies. Even though there seems to be no complete agreement and researchers' classifications overlap, Rebecca Oxford's classification (1990:16-22) is the most complete and the easiest to understand. She classifies them into two big groups: direct and indirect.

The first group, as its name suggests, directly involves the target language and require mental processing. Direct strategies are subdivided in three main groups: memory, which help students store and retrieve new information; cognitive, which enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means and compensation, which allow learners to use the language for comprehension or production despite their limitations in knowledge.

Indirect strategies support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language. They are in metacognitive, which allow learners to control their own cognition, to coordinate their learning process; affective, which help them to

regulate emotions, motivations, attitudes and values and social, which help students learn through interaction with others. (See appendix 1 for a detailed classification and examples of learning strategies).

2. **METHOD**

2.1 Statement of Purpose

After working with the 5th grade group during the diagnostic period I observed that the students seemed not to have acquired the vocabulary they had worked with during 4th year. I had to revise the way I dealt with the teaching of vocabulary. To deal with this problem from the very beginning, I decided to work during the diagnostic period with this year's 4th group. I had to find out if the students knew about learning strategies. If they did not, I would have to change my teaching approach in order to help them discover and implement vocabulary learning strategies. This would help them become better independent language learners.

2.2 Methodology

I decided to carry out a mixed research study. As was stated in the introduction, elements from both qualitative and quantitative research were employed.

In order to carry out my research study, I read the bibliography chosen and the articles on Internet pages that I encountered during the research period. I observed the students' performance during the resolution of activities.

It was not so easy to observe strategies as they were being used, because while the students solved the activities they did not think aloud as they worked. The students' "testimony" was necessary to complement data gathering.

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That is why before solving the activities I elicited from the learners how they could solve them, and after the activities were completed I gave each student a copy with some statements taken from Rebecca Oxford's *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (See appendix 11) to help them reflect upon and externalize how they had dealt with the activities. The students read the statements and rated them using a scale from 1 (never or almost never true) to 5 (always or almost always true).

I also asked the students to share with the rest of the class which strategies and techniques they used to learn the new vocabulary. As the students shared their experiences we made a list of the strategies and techniques mentioned. (See appendix 2)

I analyzed the data obtained from my observations and the students' answers to the checklists and the evaluation instrument. With the data obtained I will reinforce or reject my hypothesis.

2.2.1 Group description

The group chosen consisted of 21 9-10 year old students in a state school in a small town called Vivorata, in the province of Buenos Aires. They learn English as a foreign language, which means that the only contact they have with the language is at school, twice a week during 50 minutes. As English teachers we must make the most out of our class since students do not have possibilities to use the language to communicate outside the school (as it is the case with English as a second language). In state schools students have their first formal contact with the language when they attend 4th form, therefore for most of them this was their first encounter with English.

In that state school I am in charge of 4th, 5th and 6th year (second cycle of primary education). I chose this particular group because I felt that I had somehow failed to teach vocabulary and had to review my vocabulary teaching practice.

This could be observed when the following year students reached 5th year. When we worked during the diagnosis period they did not seem to have learned the vocabulary we had worked with the previous year.

Apparently their learning had just reached short term memory: they were able to solve the activities while they were in 4th year but the following year I could observe that no long- term learning had occurred. As we solved different activities the fact that they did not remember much was evidenced. I had to do something to help them acquire strategies that could help them become independent learners. Therefore, I decided to change my approach to the teaching of vocabulary from the beginning. In previous years I did not recycle vocabulary and I did not re- teach it in different ways, I did not devote as much time as was necessary. Neither did I cater for different learning styles.

In this particular group, a few students had a small background knowledge of English since they attended private classes but for the majority of the class this language was completely unknown. Most of the students felt eager to work with the language and were enthusiastic to solve the activities. I decided to take advantage of this motivation to try to improve my teaching practice and to avoid making the same mistakes as I had made previous years.

2.2.2 Awareness raising and the importance of students previous knowledge

The first class the students were asked which words they knew in English. Most of them answered that they did not know any. Therefore many every day English words were written on the blackboard, such as “delivery”, “freezer”, happy hour”, “30 % off” and many others connected with sports and technology.

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They realized that in fact they knew quite a few words. The idea behind this was to help them become aware of the fact that they did have some previous knowledge. They also talked about globalization and the importance of learning English and it was agreed that knowing English is essential nowadays. Having an authentic reason to learn the language increased their motivation.

2.2.3 Different learning styles, different strategies

It is widely known that students have different learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic (movement oriented), tactile (touch oriented) or a combination of them. Varied activities were implemented to cater for different learning styles. As the students' learning style was unknown, different exercises were devised to provide opportunities for everyone. This was the first step to help them discover which style/s they preferred, and therefore which learning strategy could be useful for them.

2.2.4 Description of activities

The topic chosen to work with was classroom language, because the students had an authentic need and they were somehow obliged to use the language in class, and there were lots of opportunities during class time. As classes passed by, more and more phrases were included, and the students' vocabulary increased. The more they saw and used the words the better they would remember and learn them. Recycling vocabulary is essential if forgetting is to be avoided. "Spaced review of learned material can dramatically reduce the rate of forgetting (Thornbury 2005:26)." "But it is not enough simply to repeat words, or re-encounter them in their original contexts. Much better is to recycle them in different ways, and, ideally, at successive levels of depth."

During the first month of classes (March) and before they started using a course book, the students worked with classroom language, mainly for the purposes of communication during the class. The students learned formulaic phrases and chunks to express the main structures they needed to interact with the teacher and among them.

Paul Nation (2008:97) claims that “deliberate teaching vocabulary is one of the least efficient ways of developing learners’ vocabulary knowledge, but nonetheless it is an important part of a well-balanced vocabulary programme.”

Vocabulary will be taught deliberately at the beginning of the year to provide the students with some tools to work during the English class. Communication in the classroom became an authentic need and the students felt that they needed to learn those phrases if they wanted to be able to interact in class. To reinforce the use of those expressions, the students prepared posters to have visual support and have those phrases available all the time, so that they could be used whenever they were needed. Pictures were added to the posters to give the students a clue of what the phrases meant and to help them make connections between images and text. The phrases were repeated aloud to practice their pronunciation and when the students used Spanish they were encouraged to use the target language. The students solved different activities, like using a bilingual dictionary, matching, word searches, completing and using word cards, games and working with the video of a song. A detailed description of the activities is provided below.

Before the students started solving the activities I asked them which techniques they could use to learn some useful phrases in English. Answers varied depending on each activity. For example, when I showed them an activity in which they had to match pictures and phrases (see appendix 3) they suggested using a dictionary to look up the meaning of unknown words.

As this was the first formal contact with the target language, most of the students did not know many words in English. The words they had mentioned at the beginning of the

class were not very useful for this activity. As almost all the words were new to them, a dictionary search would have meant an endless activity. Oxford does not consider using a dictionary as a strategy but it is mentioned by Paul Nation (2008:3) so it was implemented. At the beginning, this was a useful tool that could aid the student's learning until they became acquainted with more learning strategies.

The phrase "*Use the dictionary*" was written on the blackboard in order to elicit that some words are usually similar to Spanish.

I expected most of the students to guess the meaning of the phrase because the words "use" and "dictionary" are really transparent, but surprisingly, most of them started looking those words up in the dictionary. Only a few students realized that it was not necessary. Therefore, the notion of transparent words had to be explained. To work later on, the students were told that once they discarded transparent words they had to look up in the dictionary the "longest" words, like nouns, verbs and adjectives. Using a bilingual dictionary efficiently takes time and training. Throughout years, observation of students' dictionary use shows that when they first use it they usually read it at random and use whatever translation they find without knowing if it is the one they need. This is usually because they do not know about the notion of context. They also had to be explained how to read the dictionary and its different parts (headword, pronunciation, meaning and examples). Reference to the main abbreviations that show which grammatical category the words belonged to and to their Spanish classes was also necessary.

This "theory" took some time (a whole class) but it was necessary, otherwise the students would have copied the first element they found. The matching activity was left aside until the students learnt how to use the dictionary. To help them a dictionary search race in pairs was prepared, so that they became acquainted with this new tool and learned to use it appropriately. They were given a list of ten words related to school (see appendix 4). Some of them were transparent, some of them were well known words

and for others it was compulsory to use the dictionary. This activity was motivating, since children usually love competitions and races.

The answers were shared in order to compare the findings. The meanings of the words were written on the blackboard. As the students had different bilingual dictionaries, answers varied. There were some differences, therefore all the possible answers that were useful for that context were included and the students copied the answers in their folders and notebooks. They were asked to “study” those words for the following class.

A word search was prepared (see appendix 5) providing a visual clue to help the students find the words. After that they were shown some flashcards with the pictures of the words they had found in the word search. As they saw the images they had to recall the words. The idea behind these activities was to expose the students to the words as much as possible. The students were finally asked to work in groups of 4 and play memo test (see appendix 6). After seeing the words many times in different activities most of them were able to participate. Rebecca Oxford (1990: 40) mentions “four reasons why linking the verbal with the visual is very useful to language learning: first, the mind’s storage capacity for visual information exceeds its capacity for verbal material. Second, the most efficiently packaged chunks of information are transferred to long-term memory through visual images. Third, visual images may be the most potent device to aid recall of verbal material. Fourth, a large proportion of learners have a preference for visual learning.”

As these activities only took into account the visual learning style, other activities were implemented to cater for different students’ learning styles. For example, to work taking into account the auditory and kinesthetic learning styles, the students played “Simon Says”. Apart from having fun, the students received aural input and fixed pronunciation and as they moved they internalized the phrases. In another activity the

students were given two columns: one with some pictures and the other one with some incomplete phrases (see appendix 7). As the phrases were read aloud they had to complete the missing words and match the phrases to the correct pictures.

Pronunciation was also dealt with whenever the students mispronounced words. The students also had to learn that English words are not spelled and pronounced in the same way (as Spanish) and they tended to pronounce the words as they were written. Repeating the words was useful for those students with an auditory learning style.

During these classes the students worked with vocabulary at word level. Of course knowing a word is far more than this. They had just worked with translation and meaning. In coming classes more information was to be dealt with, for example the notions or root, prefixes and suffixes which are very useful to learn new vocabulary. In other words, the other aspects of the learning burden of the words mentioned before (form and use) were to be taken into account.

2.2.5 Word storage

As the students worked, they were asked to prepare a word bank in their folders and notebooks, including all the new words in order to have the meaning of words available later on. They mentioned different ways of recording the meaning of those words: the first one was writing the Spanish translation. A girl suggested drawing a small picture next to each word. Another student wanted to prepare a mini dictionary, listing words alphabetically, i.e. using a page for each letter and writing together all the words beginning with each letter.

Transparent words were not included. The students were allowed to work at home, since this activity was quite time consuming and class time was useful for other activities. Besides, at home children could be helped by their parents.

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2.2.6 From words to phrases

After implementing different strategies, the students were ready to move on to the next step and work at the level of chunks and phrases. This does not mean that the students were asked to analyse every single word of an expression, on the contrary, they were encouraged to learn whole phrases. Whenever they encountered a new expression, knowing how to deal with the main words was useful to figure out the meaning of the whole phrase.

The matching activity (see appendix 3), which had been left aside to learn how to use the dictionary was resumed. As the students had learnt the meaning of some words with the dictionary search, this activity was not very difficult to solve. When transparent words appeared they remembered what they had talked about the previous classes and the students were able to complete the activity without much difficulty. Whenever they found a new word, they looked it up in the dictionary. Some of the students realized that knowing one or two words and looking at the pictures allowed them to “guess” the meaning of the whole phrase.

This strategy was very useful because the students did not analyse each word of the phrase individually, they understood that knowing the meaning of the “longest” words allowed them to solve the activity.

In order to have the classroom language vocabulary available all the time, the students prepared some posters with the phrases. When asked how they could remember those phrases better they suggested writing the Spanish translation.

As the posters would not look visually attractive, pictures were added (instead of the Spanish translation) to help the students establish connections between images and words. The posters were hung so that whenever the students needed to use classroom language during the English class they just had to look at the wall.

To recycle those phrases the students were invited to play a guessing game. The class was divided in two groups. Using small flashcards one of the members of the group had to mime the phrase on the card while the other group had to guess. Some students guessed without much difficulty, others just mentioned one or two words, while some others had to look at the posters on the wall to remember the whole phrase. As this was a practice activity, looking at the posters from time to time could not be considered cheating, on the contrary, it was a helpful way of fixing the phrases.

2.2.7 Another way of storing vocabulary

Apart from recording the new words in their folders, the students were asked to prepare word cards with phrases to practice them: on one side of the card they wrote the phrase in English, on the other one they wrote a translation or drew a picture that represented the meaning of the phrase. They carried the word cards with them and played in pairs during the last minutes of the class. They could also practice at home. Paul Nation (2008: 4) claims that strategy training has the eventual aim of getting the learners to become independent in their vocabulary learning and that it takes a lot of time to be good at using each strategy:

(.....) The strategy of using word cards involves eight principles of learning. These include the need for retrieval and thoughtful processing, the spacing of repetitions, changing the order of the cards to avoid serial learning, keeping interfering items like opposites, synonyms or members of a lexical set away from each other, and applying the mnemonic procedure called the keyword technique (.....)

For this reason word cards were included, to help the students internalize the words and have some fun at the same time.

2.2.8 More practice

Puzzles were prepared for the students to practice longer phrases. Big cards were put in a box. To help the students a little, different colours were used for each phrase. They chose the words and formed the phrases on the blackboard. (See appendix 8)

The students also worked with a video of a song which contains the lyrics. At the beginning the lyrics were hid so that the students listened and ordered the stanzas in a copy they were given. Then they were allowed to watch the video so that they could check their work and finally they sang aloud and had a lot of fun. This was useful for those students with a kinesthetic learning style (see appendix 9).

2.2.9 Classification

Before the evaluation, as a kind of revision, the students were asked to classify words and phrases in four big groups: Polite expressions, instructions to solve activities, questions and imperative phrases -both affirmative and negative- (See appendix 10). Grouping helped them to think in terms of meaning, i.e. it was easier for them to learn questions together, which they were to produce later on. As instructions were only useful

for receptive purposes, they just needed to understand them in order to solve the activities or respond to requests, so they included them in a different group.

2.3 DATA COLLECTION

2.3.1 Observation of students' work

Even though it is not very easy to observe strategies as they are being used I tried to focus on the students as they worked and I took down notes. As was said before, strategies are not always possible to observe since it is not possible to see inside the students' head and they do not always think aloud or externalize their thoughts. Some of the children worked on their own, while others preferred to ask for help and work in pairs. This did not provide much information. As this was not enough other ways of gathering information were implemented.

2.3.2. Interviews

Interviewing each student would have meant using a lot of useful class time. Besides, the students could not be left working on their own as the interviews were carried on. There was no time available out of the English class to do the interviews. Therefore, another technique was tried.

2.3.3. Elicitation

As was explained in the previous section, the students' opinion was elicited in order to find out how they would deal with new words and how they would manage to solve the different activities. A list of the strategies mentioned is provided in appendix 2. This list was taken into account when the data was analysed.

2.3.4 Checklists

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As not all the students shared their answers and individual information was needed, a checklist was implemented. During the previous activities only the most extroverted students answered, and not everyone participated or contributed. This useful tool provided information from all the students simultaneously which was to be analysed later on. The students were given the first statements from Oxford's STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING (see appendix11). Not all the statements were included. Because of the student's age and their present level of English, they were in no condition to reflect upon and answer many of the statements.

They were asked to rate the statements using a scale from 1(never or almost never true) to 5 (always or almost always true). As the questions were in English and the students would not understand them yet, a Spanish version was provided. Each of the students was supposed to read on their own, and whenever they had doubts the statements were read aloud and examples were provided to help aid understanding.

The students were told that all their answers were right and useful. This was one of the fastest ways of gathering individual information.

2.3.5. Evaluation

Evaluating the students was the other fast way of gathering individual information. A test was devised in which all the learning styles could be evaluated. It included an activity in which the students could relate images and sounds, another one in which they exercised their listening ability, and two more in which they had to produce some language (see appendix 12).

The first activity was a multiple choice one. There were five pictures and two phrases for each of them. The students had to choose the correct phrase. In the second one there was a sequence of pictures and as the phrases were read aloud, the students had

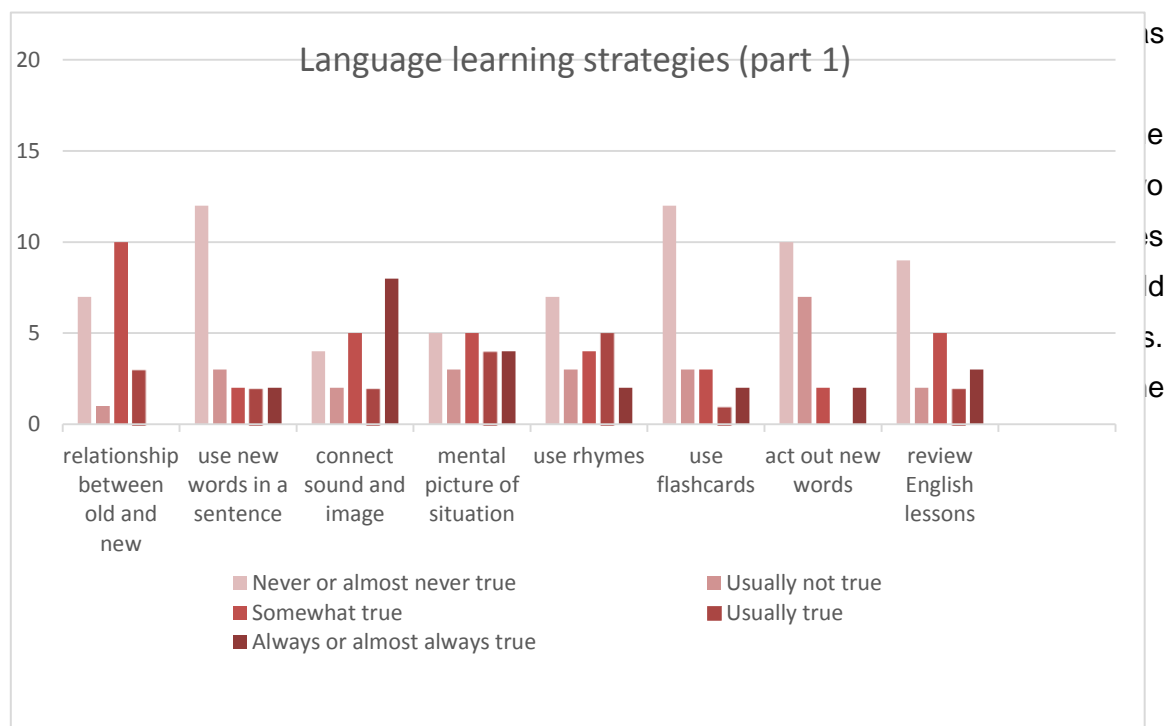
to number them. The third activity aimed at the students producing some language. They were given some incomplete phrases and some pictures of classroom situations. They had to complete the missing words and match the phrases to the correct pictures. There was an extra phrase. Finally they were given some pictures under which they had to write the correct phrases or words. The pictures allowed more than one correct answer as long as the meaning was expressed correctly.

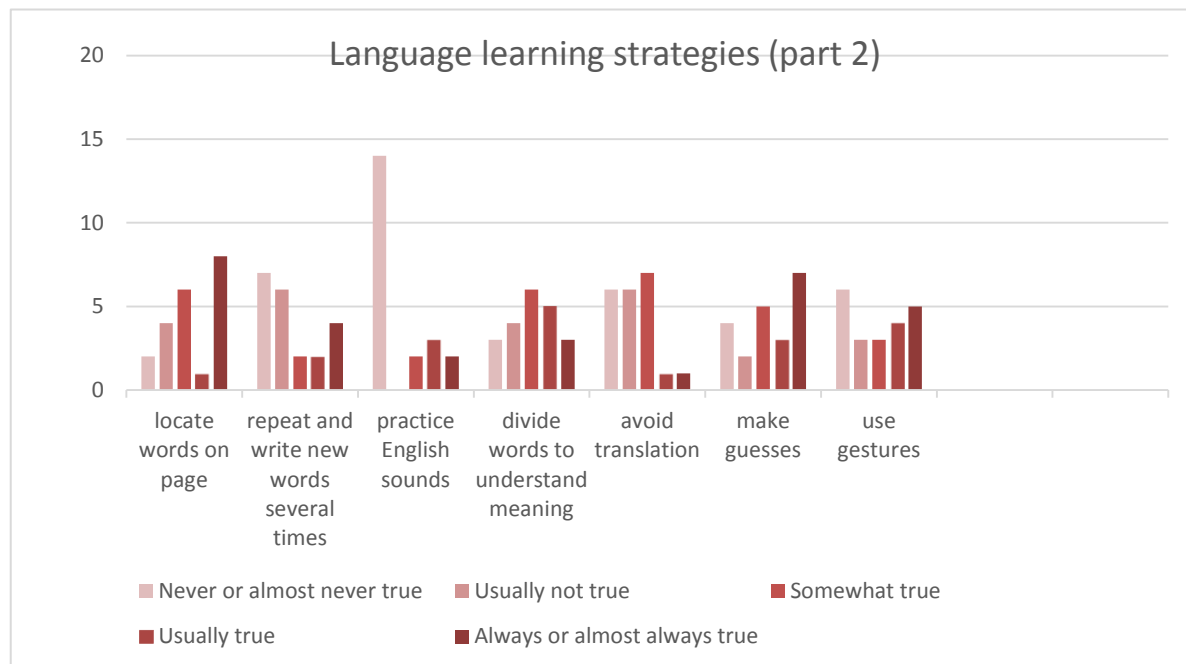
2.4 ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data obtained from the observation of the students' work and participation shows that the strategies they used allowed them to solve the activities proposed without much difficulty, since they were allowed to work in pairs, ask for help and resort to the teacher whenever it was necessary.

The checklists, however, showed a different reality. Even though they provided more reliable information, they showed more negative than positive results. All the students were able to provide their own answers without being afraid of being criticized. Most shy and introverted students did not participate when they were consulted during the resolution of activities, but this method proved useful because of its anonymity, and information was gathered without exposing the students. However, the answers obtained show that most of the students did not use many strategies.

As the students worked they did use some strategies, sometimes on their own, sometimes with guidance and help. It seems that they failed to reflect upon the recognition and use of strategies on their own. The statements must have not been clear enough and the students were not able to relate what they were reading to what they had done in class. In other words, they were not able to identify the strategies they had





The second graph shows that the use of strategies is quite balanced as regards the average answer of “somewhat true”. The answer that stands out is a negative one, the students never practice the sounds of English, which becomes an obstacle when they have to produce language: as they mispronounce words, misunderstanding may occur.

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Six students divide words when they do not understand them, which becomes a useful strategy when they encounter new words. However, this number represents just 28.57% of the students. This means that strategies are not widely used. Some of them are used in a few situations, such as making guesses (33.33% stated that they always use it). Some students also claimed that they make guesses when they lack specific words.

The following table shows a more detailed version of the results obtained from the checklists. Both the numbers of students and the percentages are shown.

	Never or almost never true		Usually not true		Somewhat true		Usually true		Always or almost always true	
	S	%	S	%	S	%	S	%	S	%
I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	7	33.33	1	4.76	10	47.61	3	14.28	0	0
I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	12	57.14	3	14.28	2	9.52	2	9.52	2	9.52
I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help remember the word.	4	19.04	2	9.52	5	23.80	2	9.52	8	33.33
I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	5	23.80	3	14.28	5	23.80	4	19.04	4	19.04
I use rhymes to remember new English words.	7	33.33	3	14.28	4	19.04	5	23.80	2	9.52
I use flashcards to remember new English words.	12	57.14	3	14.28	3	14.28	1	4.76	2	9.52
I physically act out new English words.	10	47.61	7	33.33	2	9.52	0	0	2	9.52
I review English lessons often.	9	42.85	2	9.52	5	23.80	2	9.52	3	14.28
I remember new English words	2	9.52	4	19.04	6	28.57	1	4.76	8	38.09

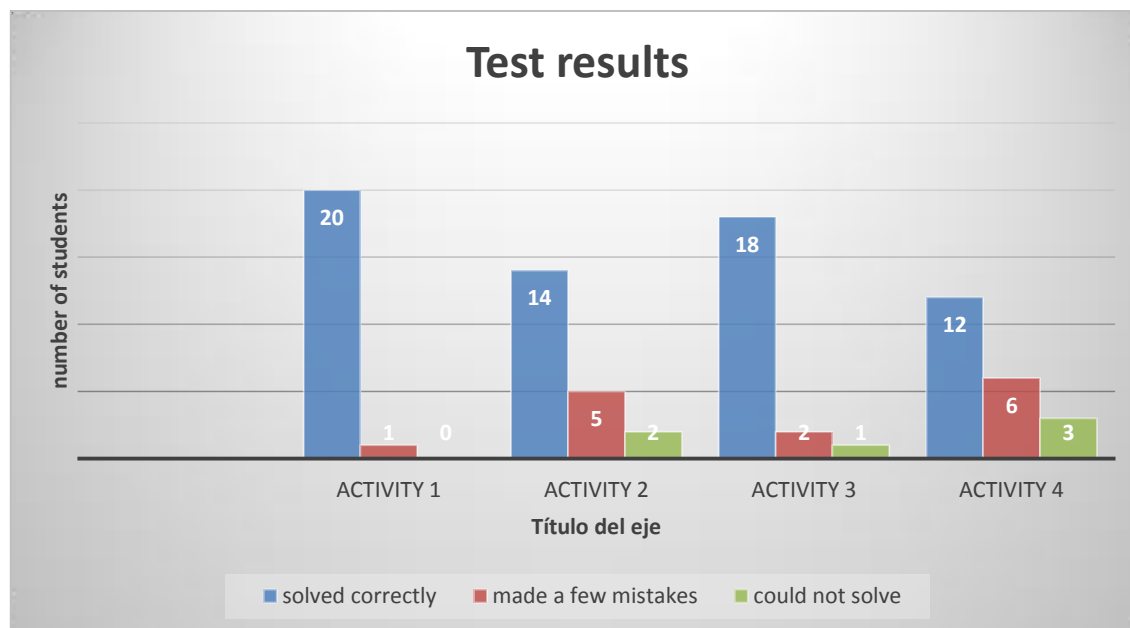
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or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.										
I say or write new English words several times.	7	33.33	6	28.57	2	9.52	2	9.52	4	19.04
I practice the sounds of English.	14	66.66	0	0	2	9.52	3	14.28	2	9.52
I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	3	14.28	4	19.04	6	28.57	5	23.80	3	14.28
I try not to translate word-for-word.	6	28.57	6	28.57	7	33.33	1	4.76	1	4.76
To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	4	19.04	2	9.52	5	23.80	3	14.28	7	33.33
When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures	6	28.57	3	14.28	3	14.28	4	19.04	5	23.80

This third graph shows in detail the results obtained from the testing instrument. The results are much better than those of the checklists. They show that for most students solving the activities was not very difficult. The visual support provided must have helped them. The first and third activities show a higher percentage of students solving them correctly. The students had to recognize and choose the correct phrase according to the picture provided. As they had worked a lot with images this activity presented no difficulty for them. As regards the third activity, they just had to complete the phrases and match them with the correct picture. They did not have to produce language, they had to recognize it. The second and fourth activities show a lower percentage of students solving them correctly than the previous ones. However, over half of the students (66.66% and 57.14 % respectively). This means that the students did not have much trouble using some strategies to solve activities. The problem seems to be, as was stated above, that they cannot reflect upon their recognition and implementation.



Results obtained from the testing instrument.

	<i>Solved correctly</i>		<i>Made a few mistakes</i>		<i>Could not complete</i>	
	Students	Percentage	Students	Percentage	Students	Percentage
Activity 1	20	95.23%	1	4.76%	0	0%
Activity 2	14	66.66%	5	23.80%	2	9.52%
Activity 3	18	85.71%	2	9.52%	1	4.76%
Activity 4	12	57.14%	6	28.57%	3	14.28%

Activity 1: look at the pictures and choose the correct option

Activity 2: listen and number the pictures

Activity 3: complete the phrases and match them to the pictures

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Activity 4: look at the pictures and write the correct word/ expression.

3 INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

3.1 CONCLUSION

At the beginning the majority of the students seemed to ignore vocabulary learning strategies. They just mentioned translation of new words and using the dictionary. The age factor influenced a lot, since the learners were not aware of the strategies they could use to learn the language. Besides, the students are not used to implementing strategies in their mother tongue and for most of them learning strategies in English was novel since they had not been able to transfer knowledge from other subjects. This must be taken into account for the design of activities, which should help the learners become aware and use vocabulary learning strategies in order to get long term learning. In turn, they could transfer the use of learning strategies in general to other kinds of learning at school or to their own lives.

Even though vocabulary was taught deliberately, no long term learning seems to have taken place. The students were able to solve the activities as they were proposed, but the results from the checklists showed that the students did not learn well. Maybe there were too many phrases and expressions and there was a lot of new information presented simultaneously. Some students tried to use the phrases to communicate and made an effort to remember the whole phrase. Some others did not even try. They had to be reminded constantly to use English and be discouraged from using Spanish in class.

It was not possible to make students think about the strategies they had used. Neither were they able to reflect upon how they had dealt with the activities and what strategies they could implement.

As regards the evaluations, results were a bit better. The images available in the test provided visual support and facilitated the implementation of some strategies.

Taking into account the results obtained, it can be concluded that vocabulary should not be treated separately, but embedded in one of the skills in order to provide a context. As unknown words appear, they should be treated depending on its frequency of use, i.e. the least frequent words should be dealt with without providing much information. The opposite should be done with the most frequent and useful words. The learning burden Paul Nation refers to (2008:100) should be taken into account.

The time factor was also influential of the results. A month was not enough to check the students' learning. Classroom language is used during the whole year and the students' vocabulary increases with time. Therefore, for the purposes of this research more time should have been devoted to work with this group of beginner students. Another field of vocabulary should have been chosen and treated as part of one of the macro skills, such as reading or listening to expose the students with a lot of input. The belief that teaching vocabulary deliberately would be successful proved wrong.

It was thought that the students would use some learning strategies connected with the visual, such as making mental images of words or grouping words semantically. They just used the ones suggested, they did not know about learning strategies. After exposing to and making the students aware of vocabulary learning strategies, it is hoped that they adopt the ones they find most useful, according to their learning style and preferences.

More practice and recycling is necessary. In comparison to previous years I did change my approach to the teaching of vocabulary, and I hope that next year during the diagnostic period my students show that they have learned something more than their previous partners. I know that I still have to make more changes in order to improve and design a good vocabulary teaching programme.

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Some students used strategies after they were shown how to implement them. This particular group has shown that they did not know about the existence of learning strategies in general. If guided, they were able to apply them. However, 21 students is not a significant number, in this particular state school, students seemed to ignore learning strategies. This does not mean that nobody uses strategies. More research is necessary to arrive at a broader conclusion.

CONCLUSION

The present paper aimed at identifying which learning strategies were used by primary students at a state primary school. After implementing different activities, it can be said that strategies had to be introduced and practiced because the students seemed to ignore them.

More research has been carried out on this topic. In his paper "Learning vocabulary in EFL contexts through vocabulary learning strategies" Lotfi Ghazal also mentions some researchers' classification of strategies (Gu and Jonhson's and Schmitt's). He claims that learners should be trained in the strategies they lack. To this

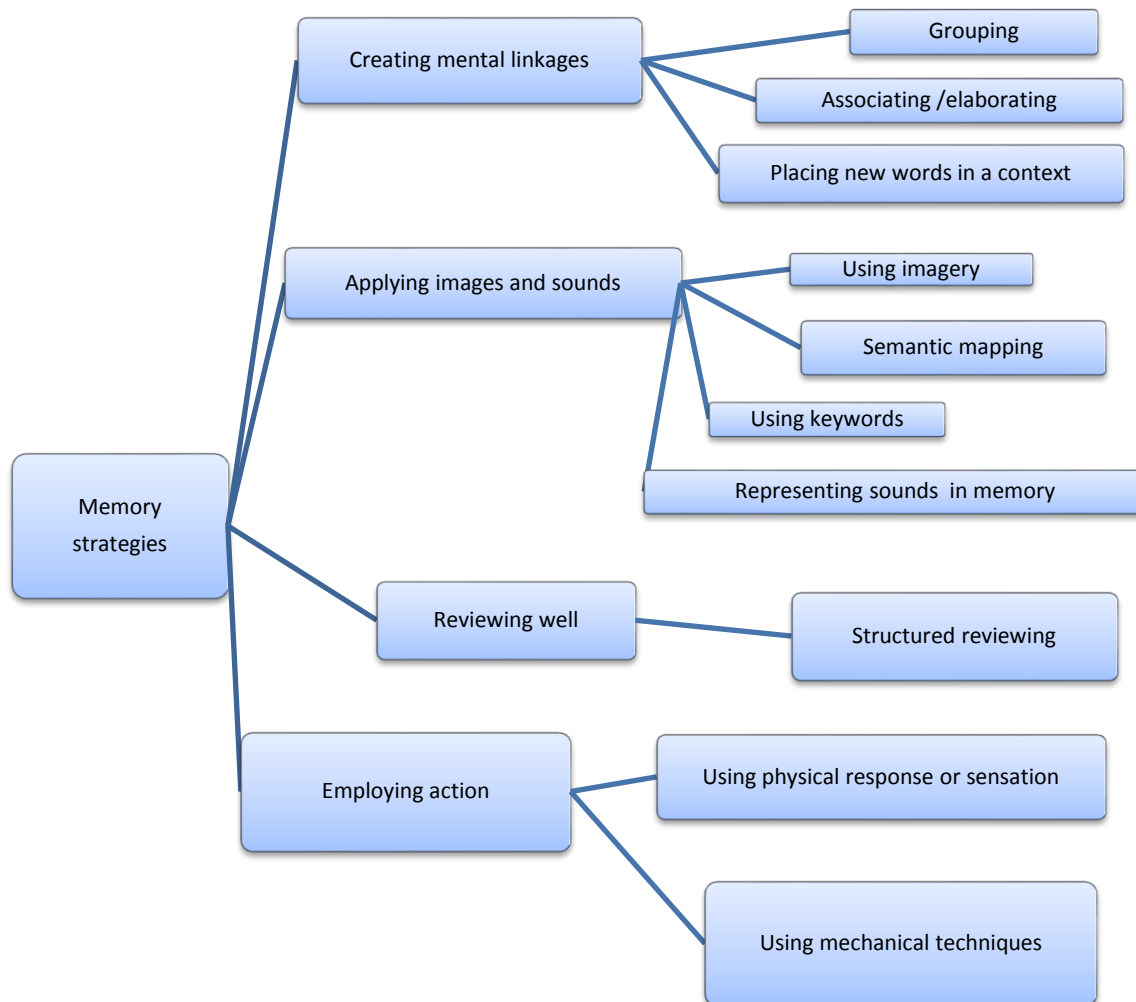
end, teachers should consider the learners' willingness and readiness to receive trainings and think of the most appropriate way to introduce the strategies. I think that these implications should be taken into account for future research papers and proposals.

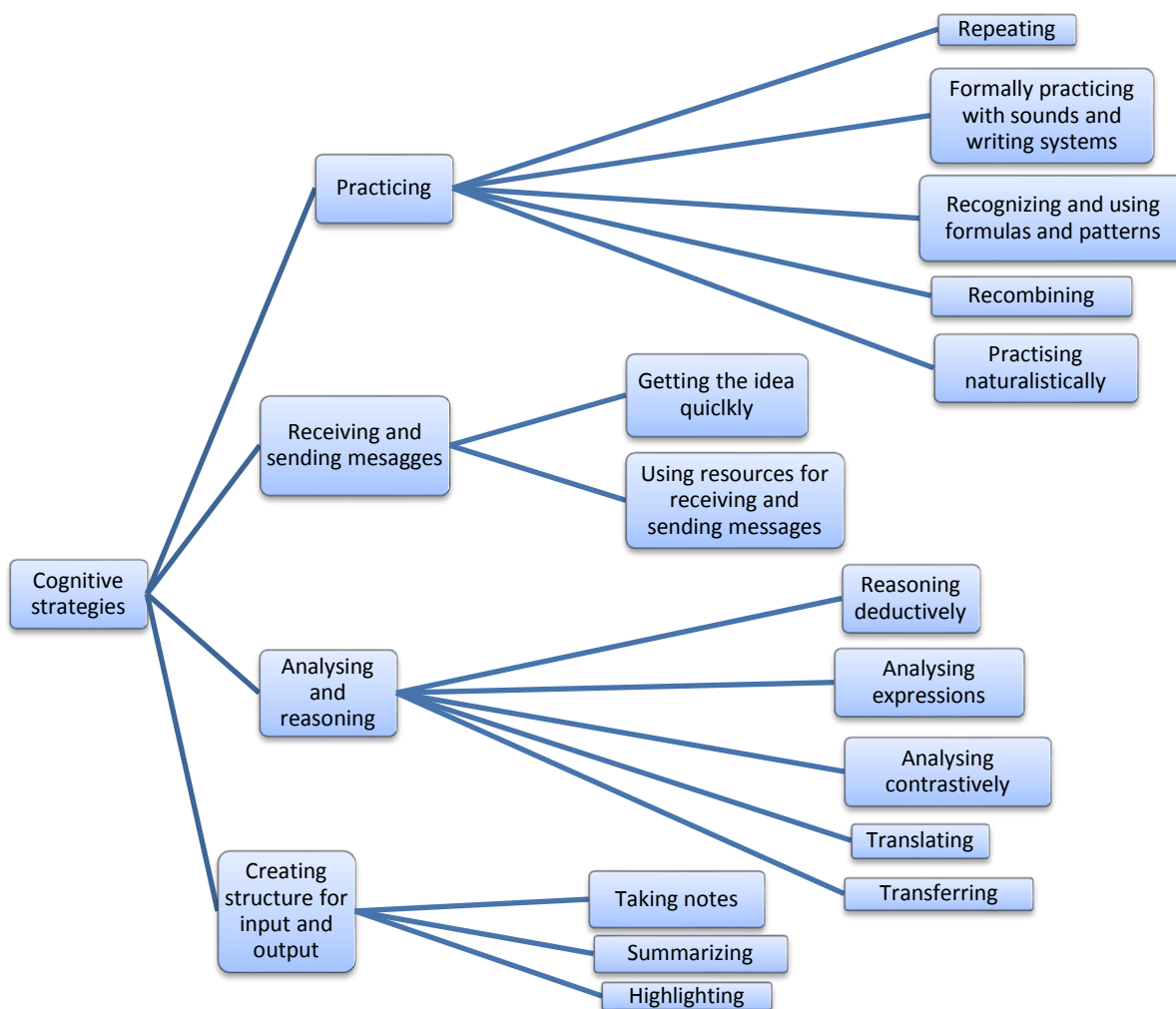
In order to help students become independent learners, learning strategies in general -and vocabulary learning strategies in particular- should become part of every teacher's methodology. This could be done by devising activities that help the students become aware of the strategies available, and by helping them identify and use the ones they find most useful. Their learning style will play a decisive role in their choice of strategies. Therefore, activities that cater for auditory, kinesthetic, visual or tactile students should be implemented.

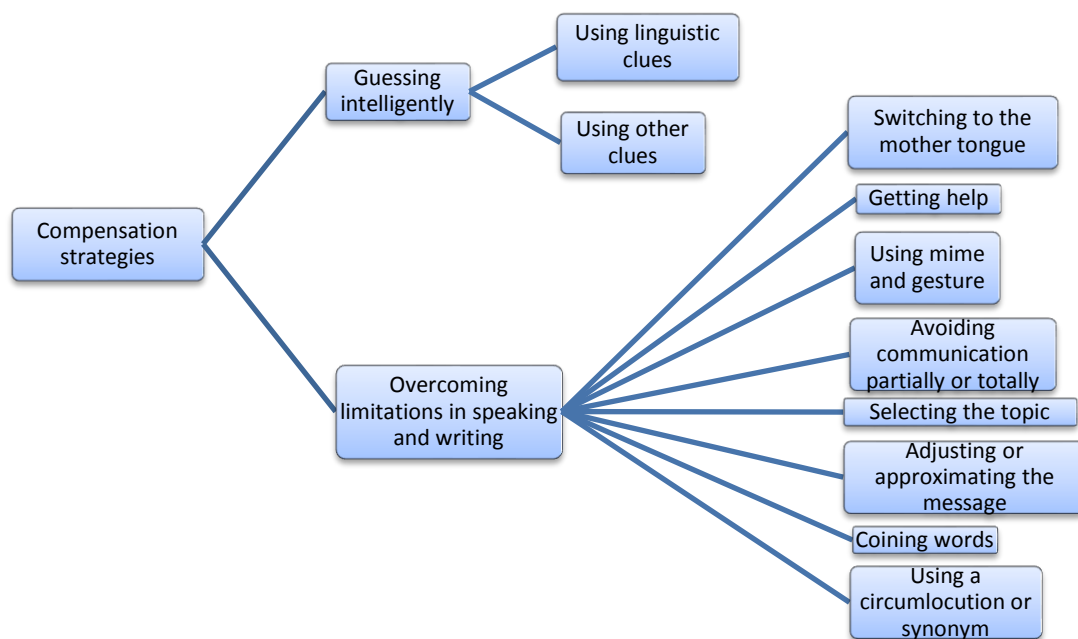
4. APPENDIX

4.1 APPENDIX 1. Complete classification of learning strategies

Direct strategies: memory, cognitive and compensation

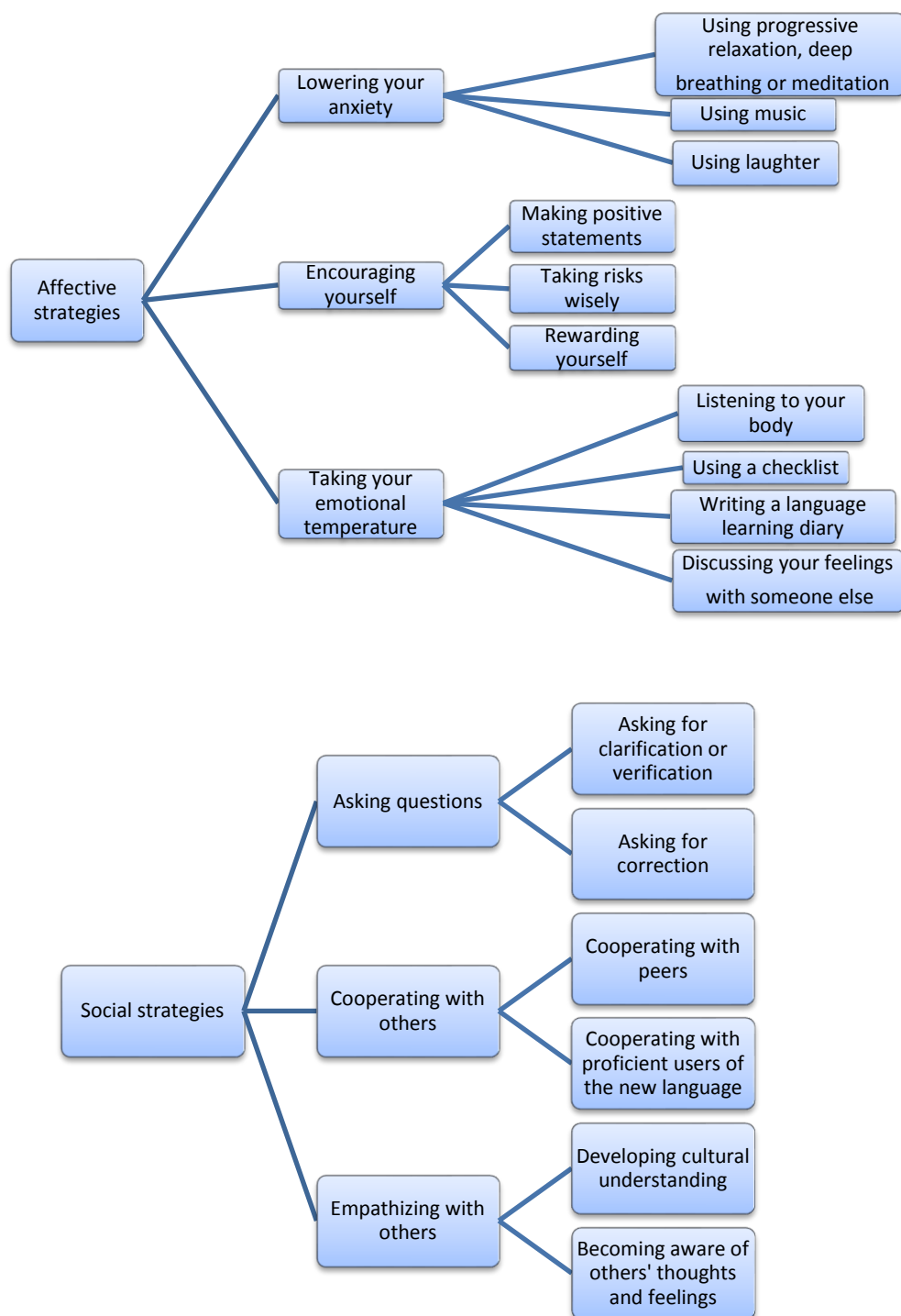






Indirect strategies: metacognitive, affective and social

















4.2APPENDIX 2

List of strategies mentioned by students

- Using a dictionary
- Translating
- Guessing the meaning of a phrase from two or three content words.
- Discard transparent words
- Repeating words and their translation to memorize them
- Asking for help, working in pairs

4.3 APPENDIX 3

Cut out the phrases provided below and stick them under the correct picture.

			
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
			
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
			
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

OPEN YOUR BOOK	CLOSE THE DOOR	RAISE YOUR HAND	SIT DOWN
OPEN THE WINDOW	CLOSE YOUR BOOK	STAND UP	CAN I CLEAN?
TAKE OUT YOUR BOOK	CAN I BORROW YOUR.....?	CHECK IN THE DICTIONARY	MAY I GO TO THE TOILET?

4.4 APPENDIX 4

Work with a partner and look up the meaning of these words in the dictionary.

Open close underline circle translate silence dictionary computer listen book

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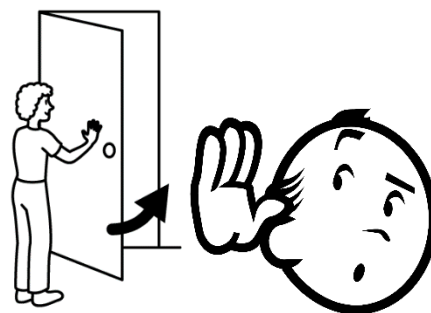
4.5 APPENDIX 5

Find ten words in the word search. Then write the words under the correct picture

U	N	D	E	R	L	I	N	E	T
C	W	I	W	X	Z	Q	L	C	R
O	S	C	L	O	S	E	I	I	A
M	I	T	Q	P	Q	Z	S	R	N
P	L	I	W	E	W	X	T	C	S
U	E	O	Z	N	Q	W	E	L	L
T	N	N	X	Z	W	Q	N	E	A
E	C	A	Z	B	O	O	K	Q	T
R	E	R	C	Q	Q	Q	Q	Z	E
Q	W	Y	Z	X	W	A	W	Z	X



blue red pink



hello: hola



4.6APPENDIX 6

Memo test cards



LOOK



WRITE



READ



CUT OUT



LISTEN



POINT



STICK



COLOUR

4.7 APPENDIX 7

Listen and complete the phrases with the words provided in the box. Then match them with the correct pictures.

thank you -sorry -excuse me-open- borrow -toilet- welcome -speak-please -write- understand



- a) Can I an eraser, please?
Here you are!
.....!
You're.....
- b) Sorry teacher, I can't hear you, can you.....louder please?
- c)how do you....."rubber"?
R-U-B-B-E-R
- d) your book on page 3 and read the poem.
Can you repeat that, please?
- e) May I go to the,
- f) I don't.....

4.8 APPENDIX 8

Puzzle cards phrases



MAY I GO TO THE TOILET?

CAN YOU REPEAT PLEASE?

HOW DO YOU PRONOUNCE "RUBBER"?

HOW DO YOU SAY "PERMISO" IN ENGLISH?

CAN I CLEAN THE BLACKBOARD?

CAN WE WORK IN PAIRS?

4.9 APPENDIX 9

Watch the video of the song "Quiet please" and order the stanzas.(Available at

<http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/songs?page=0%2C0%2C5>)

Good morning children!
Good morning!

Stand up, sit down
Stand up, sit down

.....Have you got a ruler?
Turn to page three
Quiet please, children
Listen to me!

Can I have a pencil please?
Can I have a pencil please?

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Yes, here you are.

Stand up, sit down

Stand up, sit down

.....Have you got a pencil?

Turn to page one

Quiet please children

The class has just begun.

Can I have some glue please?

Can I have some glue please?

Yes, here you are.

Stand up, sit down

Stand up, sit down

.....Have you got some crayons?

Turn to page four

Quiet please, children

Do you need some more?

Can I have a ruler, please?

Can I have a ruler, please?

Yes, here you are!

Stand up, sit down

Stand up, sit down

.....Have you got a notebook?

Turn to page five

Quiet please, children

Look at the time!

Can I have some more crayons, please?

Can I have some more crayons, please?

Yes, here you are!

Stand up, sit down

Stand up, sit down

.....Have you got some scissors?

Turn to page two

Quiet please children

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Have you got some glue?

OK, children

Put your things away, please

Put the rubbish in the bin, please

Sit down children.

Get ready, it's home time

Quiet, please

Goodbye, children

Goodbye!

Can I have my coat, please?

4.10 APPENDIX 10

Example of classification of classroom language

<i>POLITE EXPRESSION S</i>	<i>INSTRUCTION S</i>	<i>QUESTIONS</i>	<i>IMPERATIVE</i>	
			<i>AFFIRMATIV E</i>	<i>NEGATIV E</i>
Please Thank you You're welcome Can I borrow? Here you are Excuse me Sorry	Copy Complete Colour Underline Circle Match Read	Can I stand up? How do you spell/pronounce ? Can you repeat? Can you speak louder?	Sit down Stand up Open /close your book /the door/ the window Listen Look Silence	Don't stand up Don't eat in class Don't speak during the test Don't cheat

4.11 APPENDIX 11

(The statements in italics are the ones I included in the checklist I gave students.)
Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL).

Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL)
© R. Oxford. 1989

Directions

This form of the STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING (SILL) is for students of English as a second or foreign language. On the separate worksheet, write the response (1, 2, 3, 4 or 5) that tells HOW TRUE OF YOU THE STATEMENT IS.

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

NEVER OR ALMOST NEVER TRUE OF ME means that the statement is very rarely true of you.

USUALLY NOT TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true less than half the time.

SOMEWHAT TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true of you about half the time.

USUALLY TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true more than half the time.

ALWAYS OR ALMOST ALWAYS TRUE OF ME means that the statement is true of you almost always.

Answer in terms of *how well the statement describes YOU*. Do not answer how you think you *should* be, or what *other* people do. *There are no right or wrong answers to these statements*. Put your answers on the separate Worksheet. Please make no marks on the items. Work as quickly as you can without being careless. This usually takes about 20-30 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, let the teacher know immediately.

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

Version 7.0 (ESL/EFL)

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(Write answers on Worksheet)

Part A

1. *I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.*
2. *I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.*
3. *I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help remember the word.*
4. *I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.*
5. *I use rhymes to remember new English words.*
6. *I use flashcards to remember new English words.*
7. *I physically act out new English words.*
8. *I review English lessons often.*
9. *I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.*

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Part B

10. *I say or write new English words several times.*
11. *I try to talk like native English speakers.*
12. *I practice the sounds of English.*
13. *I use the English words I know in different ways.*
14. *I start conversations in English.*
15. *I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.*
16. *I read for pleasure in English.*
17. *I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.*
18. *I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.*
19. *I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.*
20. *I try to find patterns in English.*
21. *I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.*
22. *I try not to translate word-for-word.*
23. *I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.*

Part C

24. *To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.*
25. *When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.*

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- 26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.
- 27. I read English without looking up every new word.
- 28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.
- 29. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.

Part D

- 30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.
- 31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.
- 32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
- 33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.
- 34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.
- 35. I look for people I can talk to in English.
- 36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.
- 37. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.
- 38. I think about my progress in learning English.

Part E

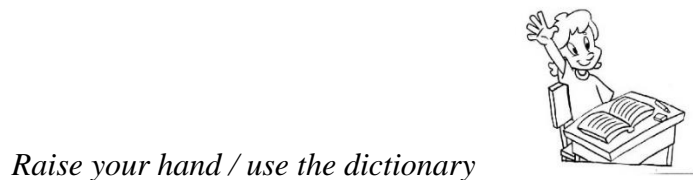
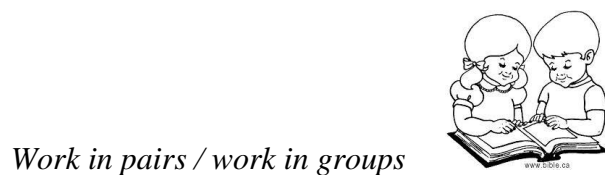
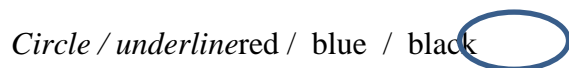
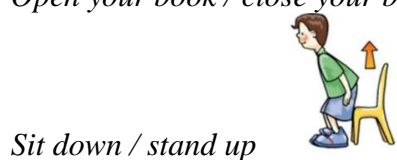
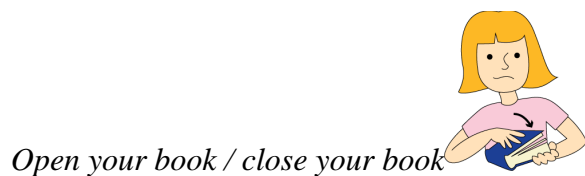
- 39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.
- 40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.
- 41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.
- 42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.
- 43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.
- 44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.

Part F

- 45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.
- 46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.
- 47. I practice English with other students.
- 48. I ask for help from English speakers.
- 49. I ask questions in English.
- 50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.

APPENDIX 12 Testing instrument

1. Look at the pictures and choose the correct option..



2. Listen and write the numbers in the boxes as you hear the phrases.



The phrases read aloud were: “Sorry, I don’t understand”, “Can I borrow your pencil?”, “Point to the picture”, “Cut out the animals” and “Stick the phrases in the correct box”.

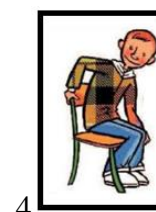
María Alejandra Cuevas

1era Cohorte. Cátedra Trabajo Final año 2013

Profesor tutor: Andrea Insaurralde

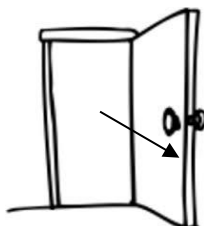
3. Complete the expressions with the words provided in the box. Then match the phrases to the pictures. There is an extra phrase

Sit down- pairs- listen- look- repeat



- ☐and number.
- ☐ Can you....., please?
- ☐ , please.
- ☐at the blackboard.
- ☐ Can we work in.....?

4. Look at the pictures and complete with the correct word or phrase.



2- 3- 4

- - 6- 7

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Time:

	2013										
Plan of action	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Literature review	X	X	X	X							
Observation, analysis and data interpretation		X	X	X	X						
Analysis of results.						X	X	X			
Conclusions.									X	X	X